

Coningsby Dawson's Father Speaks Out

"NOW I want you to obey me—just for once," said Coningsby Dawson in playful earnest to his father in a lyric little letter written in midocean as he sailed, his furlough ended, back to France to enter the trenches for the third time. "I want you to write a book. . . . There are fathers in America who are soon to become the fathers of soldiers. Tell them how to bear up; let them know they're soldiers too—the braver kind of soldiers who are left behind."

W. J. Dawson is an obedient father. In response to this tender command of Coningsby, his son, he has written a book. An inspiring book it is, a gentle book of twilight moods and silver tinted phrases wrought with a fine regard for rhythm and lucidity of thought.

He has called it appropriately *The Father of a Soldier*. For it tells the simple story of a son who went away to war and the consequent mental evolution of his father from fear to happy fortitude and then to a quiet exaltation. Through this evolution, the phases of which are frankly set down, his son unconsciously blazes the trail.

It is an intimate revelation of the relations and the reactions upon each other of

these two writers, father and son, since the beginning of the war. They are the dearest and most affectionate of friends. We see them when their placid lives and peace of mind are first disturbed by word of war. And as the war cloud grows and blackens and the cloudburst eventually comes the father cannot reconcile himself to the possible loss of his sons.

It is the soldier's place to fight, he feels at first, not the civilian's, and still less the artist's and the writer's. He cannot stand by and see his sons sacrifice their lives. There is a mute struggle as they silently gain strength in their resolve to place themselves at the disposal of their native country, England. The idea frightens him.

To convince himself of the justness of his objections he weaves about himself a fine web of specious reasoning until one day, entangled in the midst of it, he is struck by the thought that his fears are more for himself than for his sons. It is the fear of losing his happiness that fills him. He is afraid, in fact, to suffer.

The Revelation.

With the realization of that truth comes the dread that he may prove himself weaker than his sons, unworthy of them. At that moment of dread his decision is made. They go. Coningsby becomes an artilleryman, and is thereafter in the greatest danger; the two younger sons enter the navy and soon are "busy on the gray waste of the estranging sea."

Now that his fear is mastered, his mind is once more free, and he faces forward to grow with the growing age. "The son becomes a new kind of son when he is a soldier, and the father must needs become a new kind of father."

That is the marrow of this little book. The new father saw England achieve a new and democratic unity that enabled her to do in two years what the boasted supermen of Germany had taken forty years to accomplish, forty years of in-



W. J. DAWSON, AUTHOR OF "THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER."

tense effort backed up by every weapon that autocracy can wield.

And to this second vision of the war and its outgrowths he has been led by his sons, particularly by Coningsby. Sons have become the teachers and examples to-day, he says, the fathers are the disciples now. And by the letters from his boy in France, the life they tell of and the growth they mark, he is imbued with a realization of the great things the war is doing. He for one has arrived at a clearer realization of the brotherhood of

man. He has become a little less a snob than he had been inclined to be, less, perhaps, of a pedant, less intellectually exclusive. His mind has travelled far. He has become a happier and a broader man.

His sons have educated him "in the school of their own courage." "I realize," he says, "that to be unhappy is a form of cowardice, and that all true happiness is the fruit of courage."

"I have learned one thing which is not a light thing to learn," says this father of a soldier, one sad but now serene, "that the fear of sacrifice is much more terrible than its reality. . . . We assure ourselves that there are certain conditions of life which we could not endure. When the test comes we find in ourselves resources of courage of which we were unaware."

"The stuff that we are made of proves itself to be pretty much the same stuff that all our friends are made of, the friends whom we thought of as special heroes and martyrs. This is the process through which I have passed and through which thousands of parents are now passing."

The Last Parting.

This was the plane of thought he had reached when Coningsby returned to the trenches for the third time and asked at parting:

"If you knew that I was to be killed within the next month would you rather I went or stayed?" "Much rather you went," was the proud reply of the father who once had feared his going.

The resemblance in the manner of writing of the father, W. J. Dawson, and the son, Coningsby Dawson, bears out what the father says of the way each mind has played upon the other. Both have the same fluid style, limpid and gentle.

The book is in six short parts, each preceded by a poem in the mood of the part that follows. The various divisions tell of the three partings between son and father, of the father's first vision of the war, his growing fear, the second vision, his education by his son, and of the happy warrior come home.

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER. By W. J. DAWSON. John Lane Company. \$1.

While There's Life There's Hope and Love

"PERFECT of its kind" must be the reviewer's comment on *The Hope Chest*, by Mark Lee Luther.

Tom Ballantyne, heir of a confectionery maker of wealth, elopes with the daughter of a decent but poor vaudeville buffoon. It was a case of propinquity, the two having met in the Ballantyne



MARK LEE LUTHER, AUTHOR OF "THE HOPE CHEST."

sweets shop. Now as to what happened thereafter it is none of our business explicitly to tell.

But it is a good yarn. Ballantyne senior plays his part to perfection. The portraits of his wife (an embittered and defeated social climber), their ward (a thin lipped, designing girl, angered at having lost Tom, her logical prey), Sophie Perrin, a rarely wise and likable boarding school ma'am, and the rich and aristocratic young Lounsberrys—these are people worth your acquaintance if only on a printed page.

THE HOPE CHEST. By MARK LEE LUTHER. Little, Brown & Co. \$1.50.

SONGS OF A MOTHER

By Marietta M. Andrews

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Letters of Camion Men

THESE letters seem to have been published for two reasons: first, to explain why a group of American college boys engaged to drive ambulances became instead drivers of camions, the heavy transport trucks of the French army; and secondly, to set straight the facts concerning the entrance to the front of the Cornell men from whose letters most of these here gathered were selected. One of the letters says:

Some of the boys are beginning to get clippings from the papers in the States telling in the wildest manner possible the most impossible tales about the service. We are glad to get the clippings, but we are sorry that the "dope" cannot be handed out straight. Take what the papers say with a grain of salt. France is too deeply buried in this horrible mud called war to be greatly affected by the arrival in its midst of a little group of American boys, even though we do come from Cornell.

What gets me is that most of the articles print CORNELL and America, and then follows a lot of piffle about Capt. Tinkham and his bunch of sturdy Cornell men going into battle, cheered by the French and English as they march into the trenches!

No signatures are given the individual

letters and so we do not know who wrote Letter XXIII, from which the following passage is taken:

It is such a waste, not only in materials but, what is more important, in souls; not those souls which have passed on because of the war, but in those who still live and will be alive after peace is declared. Men cannot stay civilized under the conditions imposed on both the French and German privates. Living in holes in the ground, with nothing much left to live for; hating not only the enemy but themselves and the civilization which made this thing possible, they can't come out of this dirt, in which they have floundered for nearly three years, clean hearted and straight. The thing has rotted the very core of the civilization they once knew.

It is hard to realize over there the misery which these people have suffered so willingly. Witness the story of the whole thing written on the face of one French soldier who has been through it and you have proof. My hope is that the United States will not send a few men—she must send millions if she does not wish to inflict on a few the suffering and stunting of the soul which France has borne for all too long a time.

CAMION LETTERS. FROM MEN IN THE AMERICAN FIELD SERVICE. Henry Holt & Co. \$1.

Important Books Just Published

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